

Submitter: Janice Thompson

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Transportation

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4008

For all our Oregon neighbors who rely on public transit to get to work, school, medical appointments, family visits, community meetings, and innumerable other events, we strongly support HB 4008 and its prudent investment in a Transit Funding Task Force.

Oregon took an important step forward in 2017 when the State Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) facilitated transit options, especially for seniors and people with disabilities in rural areas. It is important to note that STIF's dollars from a 0.1% employee payroll tax are retained within the area served by the local transit agency. While many may associate transit with large buses or light rail on fixed routes, review of the STIF supported transportation investments compiled by the Oregon Transit Association illustrate the range of options needed to address the diverse needs across our state including demand response options, paratransit, and interconnection routes between remote communities. Another helpful background point is that STIF investments frequently complement and leverage local and federal resources.

The varied nature of transit needs and options across Oregon merits an emphasis on maintaining or even expanding a state role in transit funding. These variations are also the rationale for the range of stakeholders who would be represented on the Task Force: small, regional, and large governmental jurisdictions, small, large, and tribal transit providers, transportation workers, business associations representing employers, as well as safety perspectives and the "lived experience" of a transit rider who relies on low-income programs. The involvement of non-voting legislators is also vital.

As is true across the entire transportation sector, transit costs have increased even though the STIF funding rate has not. This more than justifies the charge in HB 4008 to assess how much funding is needed across the state to ensure safe, reliable, and accessible transit service. The future oriented perspective related to population growth and long-term prospects of revenue sources is also appropriate. An assessment of specific costs, however, would be an inappropriate task force distraction that does not honor the expertise and local prerogatives of Oregon's transit agencies.

Who would pay is an appropriate task for a Transit Funding Task Force. If increasing fares are considered, though, that option must be coupled with an assessment of the outsized impact on those who most need transit including seniors, students, and our fellow Oregonians living with disabilities.

As volunteer co-leads of the Transportation Team of MCAT (Mobilizing for Climate Action Together) we also note that transit plays a valuable role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector. As indicated in this letter, though, there are a variety of reasons to support transit funding and the work of the Task Force created by HB 4008. This range of ideas and the need for a robust transit funding discussion before the next legislative session is also why we view any fiscal on this bill as a smart and strategic investment by the Ways and Means committee.

Thank you for your work and the opportunity to testify. We urge a “yes” vote on HB 4008.

Joseph Stenger and Janice Thompson